

## **REMARKS**

In the Office Action, claims 1-4, 7-9, 16-20 and 32 were specifically rejected. However, claims 33-34 and 41-43 apparently also were meant to be rejected, and Applicant will address those claims in the comments below. If claims 33-34 and 41-43 were, in fact, meant to be rejected and the Examiner maintains such rejection, Applicant respectfully requests the rejection be formalized in a subsequent, non-final Office Action.

Claims 1, 16 and 32 have been amended, and claims 1-4, 7-9, 16-20, 32-34 and 41-43 remain pending in the present application. All claim amendments are fully supported throughout the written description and figures of the specification.

Claims 1-4, 7-9, 18-20 and 32 were rejected under 35 USC 102(b) as anticipated by the Rabe reference, US Patent No.: 3,253,842. Certain amendments have been made to independent claims 1 and 32 to clarify aspects of the invention, and Applicant requests withdrawal of the rejection.

The Rabe reference discloses a joint 14 for use in joining sections of solid propellant rocket engine cases. The joint 14 includes a pair of identical members 16 and 18 which form the adjacent ends of cylindrical members 10 and 12. The identical members 16 and 18 each have T-shaped fingers 20 with heads 22 defined by shoulders 24. The fingers are spaced circumferentially about the cylindrical members and define large spaces or slots 26 opening into smaller spaces or slots 28 having "greater width than the adjacent finger heads 22." Therefore, the fingers 20 of one member 16, 18 can be slid through the spaces 28 of the other member 16, 18. (See column 2, lines 14-23). Thus, the fingers on one member freely slide in and out of the spaces formed in the other member with no automatic interlocking engagement. The adjacent members 16, 18 of joint 14 are held together by a plurality of rectangular keys 32 inserted into spaces 30 between shoulders 24 of adjacent finger heads 22. The rectangular keys 32 are a separate mechanism inserted to prevent axial separation of the joint members. (See column 2, lines 24-36).

The Rabe reference fails to disclose various features of the currently pending claims. For example, the cited reference does not disclose a corresponding insertion extension being axially inserted into a receiving extension and "automatically interlocked with the receiving extension upon insertion" as recited in amended, independent claim 1. The cited reference also fails to disclose a "sand barrier" disposed along the connector system connecting the first and second tubulars such that the sand barrier is "positioned to block influx of particulates into an interior of the first and second tubulars" when positioned in a wellbore, as recited in amended, independent claim 32. The Rabe reference simply does not disclose the use of a sand barrier over the connector system to block influx of particulates while in a well bore. Similarly, the Rabe reference would fail to disclose the first and second tubulars combined with the "slide cover mounted on the first tubular" so that it may be "slid into engagement with the second tubular to secure the second tubular to the first tubular" as recited in independent claim 41. Accordingly, the rejection of these claims should be withdrawn.

Claims 2-4, 7-9, 33-34 and 42-43 ultimately depend from one of these independent claims and are patentable for the reasons provided above with respect to the independent claims as well as for the unique subject matter recited in each dependent claim. It should be noted that dependent claims 18-20 also were rejected as anticipated by the Rabe reference. However, independent claim 16, from which these claims ultimately depend, was not rejected based on the Rabe reference. Furthermore, the subject matter of independent claim 16 is not disclosed by the Rabe reference. Accordingly, the rejection of dependent claims 18 and 20 (as well as that of claim 19 after correction of its dependency) is an improper rejection and should be withdrawn.

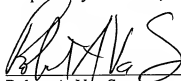
Claims 16-17 were rejected under 35 USC 102(b) as anticipated by the McCaskill reference, US Patent No.: 4,185,856. Independent claim 16 has been amended to clarify aspects of the invention, and claims 16-17 are believed patentable over the cited reference.

For example, the McCaskill reference does not disclose a first tubular having a plurality of connector portions separated by "connector portion gaps formed through a wall of the first tubular" or a second tubular with a plurality of corresponding connector portions having

"corresponding connector portion gaps formed through a wall of the second tubular" to receive the plurality of connector portions and interlock therewith upon relative rotation of the tubulars, as recited in amended, independent claim 16. Claim 17 depends from claim 16 and is patentable over the cited reference for the reasons provided with respect to independent claim 16 as well as for the subject matter recited in dependent claim 17.

In view of the foregoing remarks, the pending claims are believed patentable over the cited references. However, if the Examiner believes certain amendments are necessary to clarify the present claims or if the Examiner wishes to resolve other issues by way of a telephone conference, the Examiner is kindly invited to contact the undersigned attorney at the telephone number indicated below.

Respectfully submitted,



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